

An officer of the Special Patrol Service dropped in to see me the other day. He was a young fellow, very sure of himself, and very kindly towards an old man.

He was doing a monograph, he said, for his own amusement, upon the early forms of our present offensive and defensive weapons. Could I tell him about the first Deuber spheres and the earlier disintegrator rays and the crude atomic bombs we tried back when I first entered the Service?

I could, of course. And I did. But a man's memory does not improve in the course of a century of Earth years. Our scientists have not been able to keep a man's brain as fresh as his body, despite all their vaunted progress. There is a lot these deep thinkers, in their great laboratories, don't know. The whole universe gives them the credit for what's been done, yet the men of action who carried out the ideas—but I'm getting away from my pert young officer.

He listened to me with interest and toleration. Now and then he helped me out, when my memory failed

me on some little detail. He seemed to have a very fair theoretical knowledge of the subject.

“It seems impossible,” he commented, when we had gone over the ground he had outlined, “that the Service could have done its work with such crude and undeveloped weapons, does it not?” He smiled in a superior sort of way, as though to imply we had probably done the best we could, under the circumstances.

I suppose I should not have permitted his attitude to irritate me, but I am an old man, and my life has not been an easy one.

“Youngster,” I said—like many old people, I prefer spoken conversation—“back in those days the Service was handicapped in every way. We lacked weapons, we lacked instruments, we lacked popular support, and backing. But we had men, in those days, who did their work with the tools that were at hand. And we did it well.”

“Yes, sir!” the youngster said hastily—after all, a retired commander in the Special Patrol Service does rate a certain amount of respect, even from these perky youngsters—“I know that, sir. It was the efforts of men like yourself who gave us the proud traditions we have to-day.”

“Well, that’s hardly true,” I corrected him. “I’m not quite so old as that. We had a fine set of traditions when I entered the Service, son. But we did our share to carry them on, I’ll grant you that.”

““Nothing Less than Complete Success,”” quoted the lad almost reverently, giving the ancient motto of our service. “That is a fine tradition for a body of men to aspire to, sir.”

“True. True.” The ring in the boy’s voice brought memories flocking. It was a proud motto; as old as I am, the words bring a thrill even now, a thrill comparable only with that which comes from seeing old Earth swell up out of the darkness of space after days of outer emptiness. Old Earth, with her wispy white clouds and her broad seas— Oh, I know I’m

provincial, but that is another thing that must be forgiven an old man.

“I imagine, sir,” said the young officer, “that you could tell many a strange story of the Service, and the sacrifices men have made to keep that motto the proud boast it is to-day.”

“Yes,” I told him. “I could do that. I have done so. That is my occupation, now that I have been retired from active service. I—”

“You are a historian?” he broke in eagerly.

I forgave him the interruption. I can still remember my own rather impetuous youth.

“Do I look like a historian?” I think I smiled as I asked him the question, and held out my hands to him. Big brown hands they are, hardened with work, stained and drawn from old acid burns, and the bite of blue electric fire. In my day we worked with crude tools indeed; tools that left their mark upon the workman.

“No. But—”

I waved the explanation aside.

“Historians deal with facts, with accomplishments, with dates and places and the names of great men. I write—what little I do write—of men and high adventures, so that in this time of softness and easy living some few who may read my scribblings may live with me those days when the worlds of the universe were strange to each other, and there were many new things to be found and marveled at.”

“And I’ll venture, sir, that you find much enjoyment in the work,” commented the youngster with a degree of perception with which I had not credited him.

“True. As I write, forgotten faces peer at me through the mists of the years, and strong, friendly voices call to me from out of the past....”

“It must be wonderful to live the old adventures through again,” said the young officer hastily. Youth is

always afraid of sentiment in old people. Why this should be, I do not know. But it is so.

The lad—I wish I had made a note of his name; I predict a future for him in the Service—left me alone, then, with the thoughts he had stirred up in my mind.

Old faces ... old voices. Old scenes, too.

Strange worlds, strange peoples. A hundred, a thousand different tongues. Men that came only to my knee, and men that towered ten feet above my head. Creatures—possessed of all the attributes of men except physical form—that belonged only in the nightmare realms of sleep.

An old man's most treasured possessions: his memories. A face drew close out of the flocking recollections; the face of a man I had known and loved more than a brother so many years—dear God, how many years—ago.

Anderson Croy. Search all the voluminous records of the bearded historians, and you will not find his

name. No great figure of history was this friend of mine; just an obscure officer on an obscure ship of the Special Patrol Service.

And yet there is a people who owe to him their very existence.

I wonder if they have forgotten him? It would not surprise me.

The memory of the universe is not a reliable thing.

Anderson Croy was, like most of the officer personnel of the Special Patrol Service, a native of Earth.

They had tried to make a stoop-shouldered dabbler in formulas out of him, but he was not the stuff from which good scientists are moulded. He was young, when I first knew him, and strong; he had mild blue eyes and a quick smile. And he had a fine, steely courage that a man could love.

I was in command, then, of the *Ertak*, my second ship. I inherited Anderson Croy with the ship, and I liked him from the first time I laid eyes upon him.

As I recall it, we worked together on the *Ertak* for nearly two years, Earth time. We went through some tight places together. I remember our experience, shortly after I took over the *Ertak*, on the monstrous planet Callor, whose tiny, gentle people were attacked by strange, vapid Things that come down upon them from the fastness of the polar cap, and—

But I wander from the story I wish to tell here. An old man's mind is a weak and weary thing that totters and weaves from side to side; like a worn-out ship, it is hard to keep on a straight course.

We were out on one of those long, monotonous patrols, skirting the outer boundaries of the known universe, that were, at that time, before the building of all the many stations we have to-day a dreaded part of the Special Patrol Service routine.



Not once had we landed to stretch our legs. Slowing up to atmospheric speed took time, and we were on a schedule that allowed for no waste of even minutes. We approached the various worlds only close enough to report, and to receive an assurance that all was well. A dog's life, but part of the game.

My log showed nearly a hundred "All's well" reports, as I remember it, when we slid up to Antri, which was, so far as size is concerned, one of our smallest ports o' call.

Antri, I might add, for the benefit of those who have forgotten their maps of the universe, is a satellite of A-411, which, in turn, is one of the largest bodies of the universe, and both uninhabited and uninhabitable. Antri is somewhat larger than the moon, Earth's satellite, and considerably farther from its controlling body.

"Report our presence, Mr. Croy," I ordered wearily. "And please ask Mr. Correy to keep a sharp watch on the attraction meter." These huge bodies such as A-411 are not pleasant companions at space speeds. A

few minute's trouble—space ships gave trouble, in those days—and you melted like a drop of solder when you struck the atmospheric belt.

“Yes, sir!” There never was a crisper young officer than Croy.

I bent over my tables, working out our position and charting our course for the next period. In a few seconds Croy was back, his blue eyes gleaming.

“Sir, an emergency is reported on Antri. We are to make all possible speed, to Oreo, their governing city. I gather that it is very important.”

“Very well, Mr. Croy.” I can't say the news was unwelcome. Monotony kills young men. “Have the disintegrator ray generators inspected and tested. Turn out the watch below in such time that we may have all hands on duty when we arrive. If there is an emergency, we shall be prepared for it. I shall be with Mr. Correy in the navigating room; if there are any further communications, relay them to me there.”

I hurried up to the navigating room, and gave Correy his orders.

“Do not reduce speed until it is absolutely necessary,” I concluded. “We have an emergency call from Antri, and minutes may be important. How long do you make it to Oreo?”

“About an hour to the atmosphere; say an hour more to set down in the city. I believe that’s about right, sir.”

I nodded, frowning at the twin charts, with their softly glowing lights, and turned to the television disc, picking up Antri without difficulty.

Of course, back in those days we had the huge and cumbersome discs, their faces shielded by a hood, that would be suitable only for museum pieces now. But they did their work very well, and I searched Antri carefully, at varying ranges, for any sign of disturbances. I found none.

The dark portion, of course, I could not penetrate. Antri has one portion of its face that is turned forever from its sun, and one half that is bathed in perpetual light. The long twilight zone was uninhabited, for the people of Antri are a sun-loving race, and their cities and villages appeared only in the bright areas of perpetual sunlight.

Just as we reduced to atmospheric speed, Croy sent up a message

“The Governing Council sends word that we are to set down on the platform atop the Hall of Government, the large, square white building in the center of the city. They say we will have no difficulty in locating it.”

I thanked him and ordered him to stand by for further messages, if any, and picked up the far-flung city of Oreo in my television disc.

There was no mistaking the building Croy had mentioned. It stood out from the city around it, cool and white, its mighty columns glistening like crystal in the sun. I could even make out the landing

platform, slightly elevated above the roof on spidery arches of silvery metal.

We sped straight for the city at just a fraction of space speed, but the hand of the surface temperature gauge crept slowly toward the red line that marked the dangerous incandescent point. I saw that Correy, like the good navigating officer he was, was watching the gauge as closely as myself, and hence said nothing. We both knew that the Antrians would not have sent a call for help to a ship of the Special Patrol Service if there had not been a real emergency.

Correy had made a good guess in saying that it would take about an hour, after entering the gaseous envelope of Antri, to reach our destination. It was just a few minutes—Earth time, of course—less than that when we settled gently onto the landing platform.

A group of six or seven Antrians, dignified old men, wearing the short, loosely belted white robes that we found were their universal costume, were waiting for us at the exit of the *Ertak*, whose sleek, smooth sides were glowing dull red.

“You have hastened, and that is well, sirs,” said the spokesman of the committee. “You find Antri in dire need.” He spoke in the universal language, and spoke it softly and perfectly. “But you will pardon me for greeting you with that which is, of necessity, uppermost in my mind, and in the minds of these, my companions.

“Permit me to welcome you to Antri, and to introduce those who extend those greetings.” Rapidly, he ran through a list of names, and each of the men bowed gravely in acknowledgment of our greetings. I have never observed a more courteous nor a more courtly people than the Antrians; their manners are as beautiful as their faces.

Last of all, their spokesman introduced himself. Bori Tulber, he was called, and he had the honor of being master of the Council—the chief executive of Antri.

When the introductions had been completed, the committee led our little party to a small, cylindrical elevator which dropped us, swiftly and silently, on a cushion of air, to the street level of the great building.

Across a wide, gleaming corridor our conductors led us, and stood aside before a massive portal through which ten men might have walked abreast.

We found ourselves in a great chamber with a vaulted ceiling of bright, gleaming metal. At the far end of the room was an elevated rostrum, flanked on either side by huge, intricate masses of statuary, of some creamy, translucent stone that glowed as with some inner light. Semicircular rows of seats, each with its carved desk, surmounted by numerous electrical controls, occupied all the floor space. None of the seats was occupied.

“We have excused the Council from our preliminary deliberations,” explained Bori Tulber, “because such a large body is unwieldy. My companions and myself represent the executive heads of the various departments of the Council, and we are empowered to act.” He led us through the great council chamber, and into an anteroom, beautifully decorated, and furnished with exceedingly comfortable chairs.

“Be seated, sirs,” the Master of the Council suggested. We obeyed silently, and Bori Tulber stood before, gazing thoughtfully into space.

“I do not know just where to begin,” he said slowly.

“You men in uniform know, I presume, but little of this world of ours. I presume I had best begin far back.

“Since you are navigators of space, undoubtedly, you are acquainted with the fact that Antri is a world divided into two parts; one of perpetual night, and the other of perpetual day, due to the fact that Antri revolves but once upon its axis during the course of its circuit of its sun, thus presenting always the same face to our luminary.

“We have no day and night, such as obtain on other spheres. There are no set hours for working nor for sleeping nor for pleasure. The measure of a man’s work is the measure of his ambition, or his strength, or his desire. It is so also with his sleep and with his pleasures. It is—it has been—a very pleasant arrangement.



“Ours is a fertile country, and our people live very long and very happily with little effort. We have believed that ours was the nearest of all the worlds to the ideal; that nothing could disturb the peace and happiness of our people. We were mistaken.

“There is a dark side to Antri. A side upon which the sun never has shone. A dismal place of gloom, which is like the night upon other worlds.

“No Antrian has, to our knowledge, ever penetrated this part of Antri, and lived to tell of his experience. We do not even till the land close to the twilight zone. Why should we, when we have so much fine land upon which the sun shines bright and fair always, save for the two brief seasons of rain?

“We have never given thought to what might be on the dark face of Antri. Darkness and night are things unknown to us; we know of them only from the knowledge which has come to us from other worlds. And now—now we have been brought face to face with a terrible danger which comes to us from that other side of this sphere.

“A people have grown there. A terrible people that I shall not try to describe to you. They threaten us with slavery, with extinction. Four ara ago (the Antrians have their own system of reckoning time, just as we have on Earth, instead of using the universal system, based upon the enaro. An ara corresponds to about fifty hours, Earth time.) we did not know that such a people existed. Now their shadow is upon all our beautifully sunny country, and unless you can aid us, before other help can reach us, I am convinced that Antri is doomed!”

For a moment not one of us spoke. We sat there, staring at the old man who had just ceased speaking.

Only a man ripened and seasoned with the passing of years could have stood there before us and uttered, so quietly and solemnly, words such as had just come from his lips. Only in his eyes could we catch a glimpse of the torment which gripped his soul.

“Sir,” I said, and have never felt younger than at that moment, when I tried to frame some assurance to this splendid old man who had turned to me and my

youthful crew for succor, “we shall do what it lies within our power to do. But tell us more of this danger which threatens.

“I am no man of science, and yet I cannot see how men could live in a land never reached by the sun. There would be no heat, no vegetation. Is that not so?”

“Would that it were!” replied the Master of the Council, bitterly. “What you say would be indeed the truth, were it not for the great river and seas of our sunny Antri, which bear their heated waters to this dark portion of our world, and make it habitable.

“And as for this danger, there is little to be said. At some time, men of our country, men who fish, or venture upon the water in commerce, have been borne, all unwillingly, across the shadowy twilight zone and into the land of darkness. They did not come back, but they were found there and despoiled of their menores.

“Somehow, these creatures who dwell in darkness determined the use of the menore, and now that they have resolved that they shall rule all this sphere, they have been able to make their threat clear to us. Perhaps”—and Bori Tulber smiled faintly and terribly —“you would like to have that message direct from its bearer?”

“Is that possible, sir?” I asked eagerly, glancing around the room. “How—”

“Come with me,” said the Master of the Council gently. “Alone—for too many near him excites this terrible messenger. You have your menore?”

“No. I had not thought there would be need of it.” The menores of those days, it should be remembered, were heavy, cumbersome circlets that were worn upon the head like a sort of crown, and one did not go so equipped unless in real need of the device. To-day, of course, your menores are but jeweled trinkets that convey thought a score of times more effectively, and weigh but a tenth as much.

“It is a lack easily remedied.” Bori Tulber excused himself with a little bow and hurried out into the great council chamber, to appear again in a moment with a menore in either hand.

“Now, if your companions and mine will excuse us for a moment....” He smiled around the seated group apologetically. There was a murmur of assent, and the old man opened a door in the other side of the room.

“It is not far,” he said. “I will go first, and show you the way.”

He led me quickly down a long, narrow corridor to a pair of steep stairs that circled far down into the very foundation of the building. The walls of the corridor and the stairs were without windows, but were as bright as noonday from the ethon tubes which were set into both ceiling and walls.

Silently we circled our way down the spiral stairs, and silently the Master of the Council paused before a door at the bottom—a door of dull red metal.

“This is the keeping place of those who come before the Council charged with wrong doing,” explained Bori Tulber. His fingers rested upon and pressed certain of a ring of small white buttons in the face of the door, and it opened swiftly and noiselessly. We entered, and the door closed behind us with a soft thud.

“Behold one of those who live in the darkness,” said the Master of the Council grimly. “Do not put on the menore until you have a grip upon yourself: I would not have him know how greatly he disturbs us.”

I nodded, dumbly, holding the heavy menore dangling in my hand.

I have said that I have beheld strange worlds and strange people in my life, and it is true that I have. I have seen the headless people of that red world Iralo, the ant people, the dragon-fly people, the terrible carnivorous trees of L-472, and the pointed heads of a people who live upon a world which may not be named. But I have still to see a more terrible creature than that which lay before me now.

He—or it—was reclining upon the floor, for the reason that he could not have stood. No room save one with a vaulted ceiling such as the great council chamber, could offer room enough for this creature to walk erect.

He was, roughly, a shade better than twice my height, yet I believe he would have weighed but little more. You have seen rank weeds that have grown up in the darkness to reach the sun; if you can imagine a man who had done likewise, you can, perhaps, picture that which I saw before me.

His legs at the thigh were no larger than my arm, and his arms were but half the size of my wrist, and jointed twice instead of but once. He wore a careless garment of some dirty yellow, shaggy hide, and his skin, revealed on feet and arms and face, was a terrible, bloodless white; the dead white of a fish's belly. Maggot white. The white of something that had never known the sun.

The head was small and round, with features that were a caricature of man's. His ears were huge, and

had the power of movement, for they cocked forward as we entered the room. The nose was not prominently arched, but the nostrils were wide, and very thin, as was his mouth, which was faintly tinged with dusky blue, instead of healthy red. At one time his eyes had been nearly round, and, in proportion, very large. Now they were but shadowy pockets, mercifully covered by shrunken, wrinkled lids that twitched but did not lift.

He moved as we entered, and from a reclining position, propped up on the double elbows of one spidery arm, he changed to a sitting position that brought his head nearly to the ceiling. He smiled sickeningly, and a queer, sibilant whispering came from the bluish lips.

“That is his way of talking,” explained Bori Tulber. “His eyes, you will note, have been gouged out. They cannot stand the light; they prepared their messenger carefully for his work, you’ll see.”

He placed his menore upon his head, and motioned me to do likewise. The creature searched the floor



with one white, leathery hand, and finally located his menore, which he adjusted clumsily.

“You will have to be very attentive,” explained my companion. “He expresses himself in terms of pictures only, of course, and his is not a highly developed mind. I shall try to get him to go over the entire story for us again, if I can make him understand. Emanate nothing yourself; he is easily confused.”

I nodded silently, my eyes fixed with a sort of fascination upon the creature from the darkness, and waited.

Back on the *Ertak* again. I called all my officers together for a conference.

“Gentlemen,” I said, “we are confronted with a problem of such gravity that I doubt my ability to describe it clearly.

“Briefly, this civilized, beautiful portion of Antri is menaced by a terrible fate. In the dark portion of this

unhappy world there live a people who have the lust of conquest in their hearts—and the means at hand with which to wreck this world of perpetual sunlight.

“I have the ultimatum of this people direct from their messenger. They want a terrible tribute in the form of slaves. These slaves would have to live in perpetual darkness, and wait upon the whims of the most monstrous beings these eyes of mine have ever seen. And the number of slaves demanded would—as nearly as I could gather, mean about a third of the entire population. Further tribute in the form of sufficient food to support these slaves is also demanded.”

“But, in God’s name, sir,” burst forth Croy, his eyes blazing, “by what means do they, propose to inforce their infamous demands?”

“By the power of darkness—and a terrible cataclysm. Their wise men—and it would seem that some of them are not unversed in science—have discovered a way to unbalance this world, so that they can cause darkness to creep over this land that has never known it. And as darkness advances, these people of the sun

will be utterly helpless before a race that loves darkness, and can see in it like cats. That, gentlemen, is that fate which confronts this world of Antri!”

There was a ghastly silence for a moment, and then Croy, always impetuous, spoke up again.

“How do they propose to do this thing sir?”, he asked hoarsely.

“With devilish simplicity. They have a great canal dug nearly to the great polar cap of ice. Should they complete it, the hot waters of their seas will be liberated upon this vast ice field, and the warm waters will melt it quickly. If you have not forgotten your lessons, gentlemen, you will remember, since most of you are of Earth, that our scientists tell us our own world turned over in much this same fashion, from natural means, and established for itself new poles. Is that not true?”

Grave, almost frightened nods travelled around the little semicircle of white, thoughtful faces.

“And is there nothing, sir, that we can do?” asked Kincaide, my second officer, in an awed whisper.

“That is the purpose of this conclave: to determine what may be done. We have our bombs and our rays, it is true, but what is the power of this one ship against the people of half a world? And such a people!” I shuddered, despite myself, at the memory of that grinning creature in the cell far below the floor of the council chamber. “This city, and its thousands, we might save, it is true—but not the whole half of this world. And that is the task the Council and its Master have set before us.”

“Would it be possible to frighten them?” asked Croy. “I gather that they are not an advanced race. Perhaps a show of power—the rays—the atomic pistol—bombs — Call it strategy, sir, or just plain bluff. It seems the only chance.”

“You have heard the suggestion, gentlemen,” I said. “Has anyone a better?”

“How does Mr. Croy plan to frighten these people of the darkness?” asked Kincaide, who was always practical.

“By going to their country, in this ship, and then letting events take their course,” replied Croy promptly. “Details will have to be settled on the spot, as I see it.”

“I believe Mr. Croy is right,” I decided. “The messenger of these people must be returned to his own kind; the sooner the better. He has given me a mental map of his country; I believe that it will be possible for me to locate the principal city, in which his ruler lives. We will take him there, and then—may God aid us gentlemen.”

“Amen,” nodded Croy, and the echo of the word ran from lip to lip like the prayer it was. “When do we start?”

I hesitated for just an instant.

“Now,” I brought forth crisply. “Immediately. We are gambling with the fate of a world, a fine and happy people. Let us throw the dice quickly, for the strain of waiting will not help us. Is that as you would wish it, gentlemen?”

“It is, sir!” came the grave chorus.

“Very well. Mr. Croy, please report with a detail of ten men, to Bori Tulber, and tell him of our decision. Bring the messenger back with you. The rest of you, gentlemen, to your stations. Make any preparations you may think advisable. Be sure that every available exterior light is in readiness. Let me be notified the moment the messenger is on board and we are ready to take off. Thank you, gentlemen!”

I hastened to my quarters and brought the *Ertak's* log down to the minute, explaining in detail the course of action we had decided upon, and the reasons for it. I knew, as did all the *Ertak's* officers who had saluted so crisply, and so coolly gone about the business of carrying out my orders, that we would return from

our trip to the dark side of Antri triumphant or—not at all.

Even in these soft days, men still respect the stern, proud motto of our service: “Nothing Less Than Complete Success.” The Special Patrol does what it is ordered to do, or no man returns to present excuses. That is a tradition to bring tears of pride to the eyes of even an old man, in whose hands there is strength only for the wielding of a pen. And I was young, in those days.

It was perhaps a quarter of an hour when word came from the navigating room that the messenger was aboard, and we were ready to depart. I closed the log, wondering, I remember, if I would ever make another entry therein, and, if not, whether the words I had just inscribed would ever see the light of day. The love of life is strong in men so young. Then I hurried to the navigating room and took charge.

Bori Tulber had furnished me with large scale maps of the daylight portion of Antri. From the information conveyed to me by the messenger of the people of

darkness—the Chisee they called themselves, as nearly as I could get the sound—I rapidly sketched in the map of the other side of Antri, locating their principal city with a small black circle.

Realising that the location of the city we sought was only approximate, we did not bother to work out exact bearings. We set the *Ertak* on her course at a height of only a few thousand feet, and set out at low atmospheric speed, anxiously watching for the dim line of shadow that marked the twilight zone, and the beginning of what promised to be the last mission of the *Ertak* and every man she carried within her smooth, gleaming body.

“Twilight zone in view, sir,” reported Croy at length.

“Thank you, Mr. Croy. Have all the exterior lights and searchlights turned on. Speed and course as at present, for the time being.”

I picked up the twilight zone without difficulty in the television disc, and at full power examined the terrain.



The rich crops that fairly burst from the earth of the sunlit portion of Antri were not to be observed here. The Antrians made no effort to till this ground, and I doubt that it would have been profitable to do so, even had they wished to come so close to the darkness they hated.

The ground seemed dank, and great dark slugs moved heavily upon its greasy surface. Here and there strange pale growths grew in patches—twisted, spotted growths that seemed somehow unhealthy and poisonous.

I searched the country ahead, pressing further and further into the line of darkness that was swiftly approaching. As the light of the sun faded, our monstrous searchlights cut into the gloom ahead, their great beams slashing the shadows.

In the dark country I had expected to find little if any vegetable growth. Instead, I found that it was a veritable jungle through which even our searchlight rays could not pass.

How tall the growths of this jungle might be, I could not tell, yet I had the feeling that they were tall indeed. They were not trees, these pale, weedy arms that reached towards the dark sky. They were soft and pulpy, and without leaves; just long naked sickly arms that divided and subdivided and ended in little smooth stumps like amputated limbs.

That there was some kind of activity within the shelter of this weird jungle, was evident enough, for I could catch glimpses, now and then of moving things. But what they might be, even the searching eye of the television disc could not determine.

One of our searchlight beams, waving through the darkness like the curious antenna of some monstrous insect, came to rest upon a spot far ahead. I followed the beam with the disc, and bent closer, to make sure my eyes did not deceive me.

I was looking at a vast cleared place in the pulpy jungle—a cleared space in the center of which there was a city.

A city built of black, sweating stone, each house exactly like every other house: tall, thin slices of stone, without windows, chimneys or ornamentation of any kind. The only break in the walls was the slit-like door of each house. Instead of being arranged along streets crossing each other at right angles, these houses were built in concentric circles broken only by four narrow streets then ran from the open space in the center of the city to the four points of the compass. Around the entire city was an exceedingly high wall built of and buttressed with the black, sweating stone of which the houses were constructed.

That it was a densely populated city there was ample evidence. People—they were creatures like the messenger; that the Chisee are a people, despite their terrible shape, is hardly debatable—were running up and down the four radial streets, and around the curved connecting streets, in the wildest confusion, their double-elbowed arms flung across their eyes. But even as I watched, the crowd thinned and melted swiftly away, until the streets of the queer, circular city were utterly deserted.

“The city ahead is not the one we are seeking, sir?” asked Croy, who had evidently been observing the scene through one of the smaller television discs. “I take it that governing city will be farther in the interior.”

“According to my rather sketchy information, yes.” I replied. “However, keep all the searchlight operators busy, going over very bit of the country within the reach of their beams. You have men on all the auxiliary television discs?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. Any findings of interest should be reported to me instantly. And—Mr. Croy!”

“Yes, sir?”

“You might order, if you will, that rations be served all men at their posts.” Over such country as this, I felt it would be wise to have every man ready for an emergency. It was, perhaps, as well that I issued this order.

It was perhaps half an hour after we had passed the circular city when, far ahead, I could see the pale, unhealthy forest thinning out. A half dozen of our searchlight beams played upon the denuded area, and as I brought the television disc to bear I saw that we were approaching a vast swamp, in which little pools of black water reflected the dazzling light of our searching beams.

Nor was this all. Out of the swamp a thousand strange, winged things were rising: yellowish, bat-like things with forked tails and fierce hooked beaks. And like some obscene miasma from that swamp, they rose and came straight for the *Ertak*!

Instantly I pressed the attention signal that warned every man on the ship.

“All disintegrator rays in action at once!” I barked into the transmitter. “Broad beams, and full energy. Bird-like creatures, dead ahead; do not cease action until ordered!”

I heard the disintegrator ray generators deepen their notes before I finished speaking, and I smiled grimly, turning to Correy.

“Slow down as quickly and as much as possible, Mr. Correy,” I ordered. “We have work to do ahead.”

He nodded, and gave the order to the operating room; I felt the forward surge that told me my order was being obeyed, and turned my attention again to the television disc.

The ray operators were doing their work well. The search lights showed the air streaked with fine siftings of greasy dust, and these strange winged creatures were disappearing by the scores as the disintegrator rays beat and played upon them.

But they came on gamely, fiercely. Where there had been thousands, there were but hundreds ... scores ... dozens....

There were only five left. Three of them disappeared at once, but the two remaining came on

unhesitatingly, their dirty yellow bat-like wings flapping heavily, their naked heads outstretched, and hooked beaks snapping.

One of them disappeared in a little sifting of greasy dust, and the same ray dissolved one wing of the remaining creature. He turned over suddenly, the one good wing flapping wildly, and tumbled towards the waiting swamp that has spawned him. Then, as the ray eagerly followed him, the last of that hellish brood disappeared.

“Circle slowly, Mr. Correy,” I ordered. I wanted to make sure there were none of these terrible creatures left. I felt that nothing so terrible should be left alive—even in a world of darkness.

Through the television disc I searched the swamp. As I had half suspected, the filthy ooze held the young of this race of things: grub-like creatures that flipped their heavy bodies about in the slime, alarmed by the light which searched them out.

“All disintegrator rays on the swamp,” I ordered.

“Sweep it from margin to margin. Let nothing be left alive there.”

I had a well trained crew. The disintegrator rays massed themselves into a marching wall of death, and swept up and down the swamp as a plough turns its furrows.

It was easy to trace their passage, for behind them the swamp disappeared, leaving in its stead row after row of broad, dusty paths. When we had finished there was no swamp: there was only a naked area upon which nothing lived, and upon which, for many years, nothing would grow.

“Good work,” I commended the disintegrator ray men. “Cease action.” And then, to Correy, “Put her on her course again, please.”

An hour went by. We passed several more of the strange, damp circular cities, differing from the first we had seen only in the matter of size. Another hour passed, and I became anxious. If we were on our



proper course, and I had understood the Chisee messenger correctly, we should be very close to the governing city. We should—

The waving beam of one of the searchlights came suddenly to rest. Three or four other beams followed it—and then all the others.

“Large city to port, sir!” called Croy excitedly.

“Thank you. I believe it is our destination. Cut all searchlights except the forward beam. Mr. Correy!”

“Yes, sir.”

“You can take her over visually now, I believe. The forward searchlight beam will keep our destination in view for you. Set her down cautiously in the center of the city in any suitable place. And—remain at the controls ready for any orders, and have the operating room crew do likewise.”

“Yes, sir,” said Correy crisply.

With a tenseness I could not control, I bent over the hooded television disc and studied the mighty governing city of the Chisee.

The governing city of the Chisee was not unlike the others we had seen, save that it was very much larger, and had eight spoke-like streets radiating from its center, instead of four. The protective wall was both thicker and higher.

There was another difference. Instead of a great open space in the center of the city, there was a central, park-like space, in the middle of which was a massive pile, circular in shape, and built, like all the rest of the city, of the black, sweating rock which seemed to be the sole building material of the Chisee.

We set the *Ertak* down close to the big circular building, which we guessed—and correctly—to be the seat of government. I ordered the searchlight ray to be extinguished the moment we landed, and the ethon tubes that illuminated our ship inside to be turned off, so that we might accustom our eyes as much as

possible to darkness, finding our way about with small ethon tube flashlights.

With a small guard, I stood at the forward exit of the *Ertak* and watched the huge circular door back out on its mighty threads, and finally swing to one side on its massive gimbals. Croy—the only officer with me—and I both wore our menores, and carried full expeditionary equipment, as did the guard.

The Chisee messenger, grimacing and talking excitedly in his sibilant, whispering voice, crouched on all fours (he could not stand in that small space) and waited, three men of the guard on either side of him. I placed his menore on his head and gave him simple, forceful orders, picturing them for him as best I could:

“Go from this place and find others of your kind. Tell them that we would speak to them with things such as you have upon your head. Run swiftly!”

“I will run,” he conveyed to me, “to those great ones who sent me.” He pictured them fleetingly. They were

creatures like himself, save that they were elaborately dressed in fine skins of several pale colors, and wore upon their arms, between their two elbows, broad circlets of carved metal which I took to be emblems of power or authority, since the chief of them all wore a very broad band. Their faces were much more intelligent than their messenger had led me to expect, and their eyes, very large and round, and not at all human, were the eyes of thoughtful, reasoning creatures.

Doubled on all fours, the Chisee crept through the circular exit, and straightened up. As he did so, from out of the darkness a score or more of his fellows rushed up, gathering around him, and blocking the exit with their reedy legs. We could hear than talking excitedly in high-pitched, squeaky whispers. Then, suddenly I received an expression from the Chisee who wore the minore:

“Those who are with me have come from those in power. They say one of you, and one only, is to come with us to our big men who will learn, through a thing

such as I wear upon my head, that which you wish to say to them. You are to come quickly; at once.”

“I will come,” I replied. “Have those with you make way—”

A heavy hand fell upon my shoulder; a voice spoke eagerly in my ear:

“Sir, you must not go!” It was Croy, and his voice shook with feeling. “You are in command of the *Ertak*; she, and those in her need you. Let me go! I insist, sir!”

I turned in the darkness, quickly and angrily.

“Mr. Croy,” I said swiftly, “do you realize that you are speaking to your commanding officer?”

I felt his grip tighten on my arm as the reproof struck home.

“Yes, sir,” he said doggedly. “I do. But I repeat that your duty commands you to remain here.”

“The duty of a commander in this Service leads him to the place of greatest danger, Mr. Croy,” I informed him.

“Then stay with your ship, sir!” he pleaded, craftily. “This may be some trick to get you away, so that they may attack us. Please! Can’t you see that I am right, sir?”

I thought swiftly. The earnestness of the youngster had touched me. Beneath the formality and the “sirs” there was a real affection between us.

In the darkness I reached for his hand; I found it and shook it solemnly—a gesture of Earth which it is hard to explain. It means many things.

“Go, then, Andy,” I said softly. “But do not stay long. An hour at the longest. If you are not back in that length of time, we’ll come after you, and whatever else may happen, you can be sure that you will be well avenged. The *Ertak* has not lost her stinger.”

“Thank you, John,” he replied. “Remember that I shall wear my menore. If I adjust it to full power, and you do likewise, and stand without the shelter of the *Ertak’s* metal hull, I shall be able to communicate with you, should there be any danger.” He pressed my hand again, and strode through the exit out into the darkness, which was lit only by a few distant stars.

The long, slim legs closed in around him; like a pigmy guarded by the skeletons of giants he was led quickly away.

The minutes dragged by. There was a nervous tension on the ship, the like of which I have experienced not more than a dozen times in all my years.

No one spoke aloud. Now and again one man would matter uneasily to another; there would be a swift, muttered response, and silence again. We were waiting—waiting.

Ten minutes went by. Twenty. Thirty.

Impatiently I paced up and down before the exit, the guards at their posts, ready to obey any orders instantly.

Forty-five minutes. I walked through the exit; stepped out onto the cold, hard earth.

I could see, behind me, the shadowy bulk of the *Ertak*. Before me, a black, shapeless blot against the star-sprinkled sky, was the great administrative building of the Chisee. And in there, somewhere, was Anderson Croy. I glanced down at the luminous dial of my watch. Fifty minutes. In ten minutes more—

“John Hanson!” My name reached me, faintly but clearly, through the medium of my menore. “This is Croy. Do you understand me?”

“Yes,” I replied instantly. “Are you safe?”

“I am safe. All is well. Very well. Will you promise me now to receive what I am about to send, without interruption?”



“Yes,” I replied, thoughtlessly and eagerly. “What is it?”

“I have had a long conference with the chief or head of the Chisee,” explained Croy rapidly. “He is very intelligent, and his people are much further advanced than we thought.

“Through some form of communication, he has learned of the fight with the weird birds; it seems that they are—or were—the most dreaded of all the creatures of this dark world. Apparently we got the whole brood of them, and this chief, whose name, I gather, is Wieschien, or something like that, is naturally much impressed.

“I have given him a demonstration or two with my atomic pistol and the flashlight—these people are fairly stricken by a ray of light directly in the eyes—and we have reached very favorable terms.

“I am to remain here as chief bodyguard and adviser, of which he has need, for all is not peaceful, I gather, in this kingdom of darkness. In return, he is to give up

his plans to subjugate the rest of Antri; he has sworn to do this by what is evidently, to him, a very sacred oath, witnessed solemnly by the rest of his council.

“Under the circumstances, I believe he will do what he says; in any case, the great canal will be filled in, and the Antrians will have plenty of time to erect a great series of disintegrator ray stations along the entire twilight zone, using the broad fan rays to form a solid wall against which the Chisee could not advance even did they, at some future date, carry out their plans. The worst possible result then would be that the people in the sunlit portion would have to migrate from certain sections, and perhaps would have day and night, alternately, as do other worlds.

“This is the agreement we have reached; it is the only one that will save this world. Do you approve, sir?”

“No! Return immediately, and we will show the Chisee that they cannot hold an officer of the Special Patrol as a hostage. Make haste!”

“It’s no go, sir,” came the reply instantly. “I threatened them first. I explained what our disintegrator rays would do, and Wieschien laughed at me.

“This city is built upon great subterranean passages that lead to many hidden exits. If we show the least sign of hostility the work will be resumed on the canal, and, before we can locate the spot, and stop the work, the damage will be done.

“This is our only chance, sir, to make this expedition a complete success. Permit me to judge this fact from the evidence I have before me. Whatever sacrifice there is to make, I make gladly. Wieschien asks that you depart at once, and in peace, and I know this is the only course. Good-by, sir; convey my salutations to my other friends upon the old *Ertak*, and elsewhere. And now, lest my last act as an officer of the Special Patrol Service be to refuse to obey the commands of my superior officer, I am removing the minore. Good-by!”

I tried to reach him again, but there was no response.

Gone! He was gone! Swallowed up in darkness and in silence!

Dazed, shaken to the very foundation of my being, I stood there between the shadowy bulk of the *Ertak* and the towering mass of the great silent pile that was the seat of government in this strange land of darkness, and gazed up at the dark sky above me. I am not ashamed, now, to say that hot tears trickled down my cheeks, nor that as I turned back to the *Ertak*, my throat was so gripped by emotion that I could not speak.

I ordered the exit closed with a wave of my hand; in the navigating room I said but four words: "We depart at once."

At the third meal of the day I gathered my officers about me and told them, as quickly and as gently as I could, of the sacrifice one of their number had made.

It was Kincaide who, when I had finished, rose slowly and made reply.

“Sir,” he said quietly, “We had a friend. Some day, he might have died. Now he will live forever in the records of the Service, in the memory of a world, and in the hearts of those who had the honor to serve with him. Could he—or we—wish more?”

Amid a strange silence he sat down again, and there was not an eye among us that was dry.

I hope that the snappy young officer who visited me the other day reads this little account of bygone times.

Perhaps it will make clear to him how we worked, in those nearly forgotten days, with the tools we had at hand. They were not the perfect tools of to-day, but what they lacked, we somehow made up.

That fine old motto of the Service, “Nothing Less Than Complete Success,” we passed on unsullied to those who came after us.

I hope these youngsters of to-day may do as well.